

# An Evaluation of the Quality and Patient Satisfaction With an Advanced Nurse Practitioner Service in the Emergency Department

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## ABSTRACT

The main aim of this survey was to explore patients' satisfaction and evaluate the quality of care provided by an advanced nurse practitioner (ANP) service in an emergency department. ANPs increasingly assume the role of providing care for patients in Irish emergency departments. Measuring the impact of ANP services on patient outcomes has become a necessary component of performance evaluation. A prospective survey design was used for this study, which incorporated a self-complete questionnaire. The majority of respondents perceived the ANP service positively. There was a high level of patient satisfaction associated with waiting times, pain management, advice given, and communication. This survey demonstrated the provision of quality of care by the ANP service and correspondingly high levels of patient satisfaction.

**Keywords:** advanced nurse practitioner, emergency department, patient satisfaction, quality

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The evaluation of patient satisfaction in the health care setting remains an important indicator of assessing service provision. Gagan and Maybee<sup>1</sup> recognized that patient satisfaction is an integral aspect of the evaluation of any new role within health care. Although there is evidence to demonstrate enhanced patient outcomes with the introduction of advanced nurse practitioners (ANPs) at a national level,<sup>2</sup> it is necessary to continue to demonstrate this at a local level also. Thompson and Meskell<sup>3</sup> acknowledged the importance of assessing care outcomes to ascertain whether they affect quality. A key aspect of the role of ANPs is to examine the quality and safety of their practice through clinical audit and research and to initiate quality improvements based on the findings.<sup>4</sup>

## BACKGROUND TO ANP DEVELOPMENT IN IRELAND

ANPs were first introduced in Ireland in the 1990s. Before the introduction of ANPs, many patients faced long waiting times. ANP services are now established nationwide, and, currently, there are 77

ANPs practicing in many of the emergency departments (EDs) and the local injuries units.<sup>5</sup> Although the development of ANP services continues to gain support, it has yet to achieve its full potential in the Irish health care system. The role provided by ANPs in EDs has been shown to support care provision by providing safe and efficient care.<sup>6</sup>

## BACKGROUND TO LOCAL ANP SERVICE

This ED manages the care of over 36,500 new patients yearly, with almost 18% (6,500) of these patients being children.<sup>7</sup> Based in a large town with a diverse population, this particular ED also serves a large rural population. Many patients attending the ED are deemed to have *minor injuries*, which fall within the scope of practice of the ANP. There would appear to be no universally agreed upon definition of the term *minor injuries* because this term is broadly interpreted by many. For the purposes of this article, the term *minor injuries* will encompass those injuries the participants of this particular study had incurred (Table 1). Other types of *minor injuries* not identified

**Table 1. Types of Injuries**

Injury/Problem	Number	Percentage
Ankle/foot/great toe	38	33.3
Hand/finger/thumb	26	22.8
Wrist/scaphoid/radius and ulna	15	13.2
Knee	12	10.5
Elbow	10	8.8
Shoulder/humerus	5	4.4
Wound	4	3.5
Eye	4	3.5
Total	114	100

in this study are seen by ANPs both at this study site ED and throughout Ireland. This particular ANP service is currently operated by 2 full-time ANPs.

### BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE FOR THE SURVEY

Because ANPs increasingly assume the role of providing care for patients, measuring the impact of their care becomes a necessary component of performance evaluation and service planning. Jennings et al<sup>8</sup> acknowledged that patient satisfaction is often a reflection of the patients' own interpretation of the quality of care experienced. Nationally, it has been shown that ANPs have a positive effect on health care; their practice is cited as being safe and effective.<sup>2</sup> Although the role of the ANP in Ireland has been established since the 1990s, it remains in its formative years, yet the role is dynamic and evolving rapidly. Information from this survey can help in the planning and development of future services.

The main aim of this survey was to explore patients' satisfaction and evaluate the quality of care provided by an ANP service. We explore the quality of the ANP service in terms of patient satisfaction; determine the quality of the ANP service by the evaluation of other measurable clinical indicators including radiologic interpretation skills, waiting times, and unplanned reattendances; and establish areas of the ANP service that could be improved in the future as a result of the findings of this study.

### METHODOLOGY

A prospective survey design was used for this study, which incorporated a self-complete questionnaire.

Patients were asked to rate their satisfaction on a survey that included Likert scale—type questions. One open-ended question was added to allow patients to comment on how the service could be improved.

Eligible patients who were treated by the ANPs were invited to complete a questionnaire after their episode of care. Participation was voluntary, and questionnaires were anonymous. The survey also examined various other clinical indicators including waiting times, types of injuries, radiologic investigations, pain management, and referrals.

### Sample

A convenience sample of eligible patients who met the criteria was included in the survey. Inclusion criteria encompassed all adults and children over the age of 2 who registered as new patients and were treated by the ANP within the time frame of the survey. The exclusion criteria included any patients who were staff members or their next of kin was a staff member in the hospital. We also excluded patients if English was not their first language and patients who may have had difficulty completing the questionnaire. Selection bias was avoided by including all patients in the survey who met the criteria. Children were included in this survey because they form a large proportion of the ANP caseload. Children who participated in this study ranged from the age of 2 to 16 years because local guidelines stipulate that ANPs treat only children who are 2 years and older.

### Survey Design and Data Collection

A prospective survey was performed by inviting patients who attended the ANP service to complete a questionnaire. A tool originally developed by Touché Ross<sup>9</sup> to measure patient satisfaction was used in this survey. Additional questions were added regarding pain management. Similar versions of this tool were used successfully in previous studies,<sup>10,11</sup> and this enhanced its validity.

On completion of care, questionnaires were given to the patient and their purpose explained. The ANPs invited patients to complete the questionnaire and place the completed questionnaire in a sealed postbox on exit from the ED. It was explained to parents/guardians of younger children that they may

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